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Remarks of The Secretary of State  
Colin L. Powell  
At the  
Swearing-In of Charles S. Shapiro  
as  
Ambassador to The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela  
February 25, 2002

Ambassador Herrera [heh-RARE-ah], Ladies and  
Gentlemen:

It gives me great pleasure today to swear in as our  
next Ambassador to The Bolivarian Republic of  
Venezuela one of our finest Foreign Service Officers  
and experts on hemispheric affairs, Charles Shapiro.

At this dramatic juncture in Venezuela's 44-year  
democratic history, and this important moment in our  
bilateral relationship, I can think of no one better  
equipped to serve as President Bush's personal envoy  
than Charles.

Charles has taken on tough challenges throughout his career. For the better part of two decades, he has worked hard and effectively to strengthen democracy, free trade and security in the Americas.

In the mid-1980s, Charles spent five years on one of toughest foreign policy accounts in the hemisphere: El Salvador.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s he worked on Andean Affairs and pioneered regional counter-narcotics efforts.

He was Deputy Chief of Mission in Santiago as Chile solidified its democratic institutions.

And, in his most recent capacity as Coordinator for Cuban Affairs, Charles has been at the forefront of our efforts to engage and support civil society on the island.

As you can see, challenging assignments find Charles. It's more accurate to say that he finds them. There are several reasons why he is willing to take on the tough ones:

First and foremost, because Charles believes very deeply in the potential of this hemisphere. Charles believes very strongly that the entire hemisphere will benefit if the energies of all its people can be freed through political and economic reform, through good governance and open trade.

President Bush and I share that same vision for the people of the Americas. And we look to Charles to take our message of friendship and to convey our high hopes for the future to the people of Venezuela.

Beyond his belief in the future of our hemisphere, there is a second reason why Charles Shapiro seeks out and meets challenges, both professional and personal. It is in his nature to do so. And his enthusiasm is infectious.

This is a man who is a natural coach and leader. Here at State, he has been active in our formal mentoring program for young officers. It was largely due to his inspiring example that two interns from our Cuban Affairs office will join the Foreign Service this year.

And, as a proud parental contingent of newly badged Webelos can attest, Charles is one terrific Cub Scout den leader. Let's hear it for Den 2, Pack 657!

Charles is also one of the State Department's most dedicated runners. I know that he's got a lot of you out there on The Mall jogging with him every lunchtime. I don't want to see any slackers after he leaves for Venezuela. Embassy Caracas will never be in better shape.

In more ways than one, Charles always goes the extra mile. He can summon and sustain his energy for the long run, and I think that is an even more crucial quality in diplomacy than it is in sports.

There is one more reason why Charles has been willing and able to accept professional challenges and make lasting contributions to his country and this hemisphere. He has had the constant love, support and encouragement of his family, above all his wife Robin and their sons Jake and Tommy.

His mother and father-in-law are here bursting with pride, as are his brother and sister and their families. Charles has been able to devote so much to his mission because his family has been so devoted to him. I think they deserve a big round of applause.  
[leads applause]

Ladies and Gentlemen, Venezuela is the third largest source of petroleum products for the United States. It is also home to billions of dollars of U.S. energy investment. And Venezuela has invested billions in the United States in refineries and distribution networks. We value our economic ties with Venezuela. They greatly benefit both countries.

We value no less the long and productive political relationship we have had Venezuela -- a relationship based on a shared commitment to democratic principles and practices.

In recent months, this relationship has been tested by words and actions from Caracas that have surprised us.

It is because the United States Government attaches such importance to our bilateral relationship with Venezuela that Charles will do his utmost to address our differences with the Government of Venezuela. It is in the interests of both the United States and Venezuela to try to find firmer ground for our relationship.

I hope that the Government of Venezuela will demonstrate an equal willingness to work on our bilateral concerns.



Charles will take up his post in Caracas at a moment of great ferment within Venezuela. The United States recognizes Venezuela's need for bold and innovative efforts to revitalize its democratic institutions, to create new space for the exercise of fundamental liberties, and to address pressing social concerns.

Yet, growing polarization and political conflict can undercut the broader goals that are shared by all Venezuelans for a more prosperous and democratic Venezuela. Ultimately, this is a problem that only Venezuelans can resolve.

In the meantime, the United States, in concert with the Organization of American States and our hemispheric partners, will continue to offer our steadfast support to Venezuelan democracy and constitutional order.

The United States strongly encourages Venezuela to participate fully in a hemisphere of democracies and free markets. And, Charles, President Bush and I look to you to convey that message to the Venezuelan people and to their leaders.

Charles and Robin, you have President Bush's and my best wishes as you embark upon this important new mission.

And now, Charles, I am pleased to administer the oath of office.